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Teenagers the Biggest Losers of COVID-Era School Closures + More

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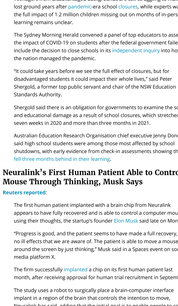
By The Defender Staff



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Teenagers the Biggest Losers of COVID-Era School Closures

The Sydney Morning Herald reported:

Teenagers from disadvantaged backgrounds are still struggling to make up lost ground years after pandemic-era school closures, while experts warn the full impact of 1.2 million children missing out on months of in-person learning remains unclear.

The Sydney Morning Herald convened a panel of top educators to assess the impact of COVID-19 on students after the federal government failed to include the decision to close schools in its Independent Inquiry into the nation managed the pandemic.

"It could take years before we see the full effect of closures, but for disadvantaged students it could impact their whole lives," said Peter Shergold, a former top public servant and chair of the NSW Education Standards Authority.

Shergold said there is an obligation for governments to examine the social and educational damage as a result of school closures, which stretched for seven weeks in 2020 and more than three months in 2021.

Australian Education Research Organisation chief executive Jenny Donovan said high school students were among those most affected by school shutdowns, with early evidence from checks in assessments showing they fell three months behind in their learning.

Neuralink's First Human Patient Able to Control Mouse Through Thinking, Musk Says

Reuters reported:

The first human patient implanted with a brain chip from Neuralink appears to have fully recovered and is able to control a computer mouse using their thoughts, the startup founded by Elon Musk said on Monday.

"Progress is good, and the patient seems to have made a full recovery, with no ill effects that we are aware of. The patient is able to move a mouse around the screen by just thinking," Musk said in a Spaces event on social media platform X.

The first successful implanted a chip on its first human patient last month, after receiving approval for human trial recruitment in September.

The study uses a robot to surgically place a brain-computer interface implant in a region of the brain that controls the intention to move, Neuralink has said, adding that the initial goal is to enable people to control a computer cursor or keyboard using their thoughts.

Artificial Intelligence Is Making Critical Healthcare Decisions. The Sheriff Is MIA.

Politico reported:

Doctors are already using unregulated artificial intelligence tools such as note-taking virtual assistants and predictive software that help them diagnose and treat diseases.

Government has slow-walked regulation of the fast-moving technology because the funding and staffing challenges facing agencies like the Food and Drug Administration in writing and enforcing rules are so vast. It's unlikely they will catch up any time soon. That means the AI rollout in healthcare is becoming a high-stakes experiment in whether the private sector can help transform medicine Unlike medical devices or drugs, AI software changes. Rather than issuing a one-time approval, the FDA wants to monitor artificial intelligence products over time, something it's never done proactively.

President Joe Biden in October promised a coordinated and fast response from his agencies to ensure AI safety and efficacy. But regulators like the FDA don't have the resources they need to preside over technology that, by definition, is constantly changing.

And the problem for the FDA goes beyond adjusting its regulatory approach or hiring more staff. A new report from the Government Accountability Office, the watchdog arm of Congress, said the agency wants more power — to request AI performance data and to set guardrails for algorithms in more specific ways than its traditional risk assessment framework for drugs and medical devices allows, the GAO said.

Medical Group Files Supreme Court Brief Against Biden Administration's Online Censorship Pressure

Reclaim the Net reported:

The Association of American Physicians and Surgeons (AAPS) has formally voiced its opposition to the way the Biden administration handled free speech during the pandemic.

This specifically concerns censorship around COVID-related information and collusion with Big Tech, currently being explored in the Murthy v. Missouri Supreme Court case.

AAPS has filed an amicus brief, to support the claim that the current U.S. administration and some of the biggest tech companies unlawfully worked together — either because of pressure on the latter or willingly on their part — to censor Americans.

This organization gathering medical professionals believes that if the goings-on during the pandemic are left without legal consequences, more of the same, only involving different issues, will follow.

House COVID Panel Leader Threatens to Subpoena HHS for Lack of Cooperation

The Hill reported:

The chair of the House panel investigating the COVID-19 pandemic threatened to subpoena Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) officials Friday over a lack of cooperation with the committee's investigation unless they answer another round of specific questions.

In a letter sent to HHS Assistant Secretary for Legislation Melanie Egorin, Rep. Brad Wenstrup (R-Ohio) expressed frustration with Egorin's recent public testimony and what he said was a persistent lack of cooperation from the agency on producing documents related to the virus's origins, vaccine messaging and policies about COVID closures.

"We know, for a fact, that the Department is currently withholding critical documents," Wenstrup wrote. "The agency's refusal to produce requested documents is unacceptable," Wenstrup wrote. If the agency doesn't respond to the latest requests for information in a way that Wenstrup finds satisfactory, he said the panel "will evaluate the use of the compulsory process to obtain the testimony of Department employees who know the answers to these questions."

As part of its investigation, Wenstrup's panel has also heard closed-door testimony from the nation's former top infectious diseases doctor, Anthony Fauci, and the former National Institutes of Health director, Francis Collins. Fauci is expected to testify publicly later this year.

'There Are No Serious Safeguards': Can 23andMe Be Trusted With Our DNA?

The Guardian reported:

Last week, 23andMe reported dismal third-quarter fiscal results, tanking stocks in the company, CNBC reported, its financial woes come down to a longevity problem: the company's most famous offering, the DNA ancestry test, is a one-and-done deal. After taking the test, there's no reason for consumers to keep spending money on 23andMe, which has led to a plateau of sorts.

From 2018 to 2023, 23andMe partnered with the pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline, using customers' genetic information to help develop drug targets. (A drug target is a molecule that plays a role in a disease; researchers use them to develop therapies for certain diseases.) This year, the partnership became non-exclusive, which means 23andMe can strike deals with more pharmaceutical companies to milk more money out of its DNA trove.

23andMe already has two cancer drugs undergoing drug trials; those drugs came from users' genetic data. But 23andMe users may not understand that the spit they gave the company months or years ago is being used to make more money.

Healthcare Data Breaches Hit 1 in 3 Americans Last Year: Is Your Data Vulnerable?

USA TODAY reported:

Patients were inundated with spam texts and other annoyances after the massive HCA Healthcare data hack disclosed last July compromised the records of more than 11 million people.

The HCA theft was the largest hospital breach in 2023, a year in which about 1 in 3 Americans were affected by health-related data breaches. The number of attacks has surged in recent years as hackers typically been carried out by organized hackers, often operating overseas, who target the computer systems of medical providers and the vendors and companies that serve them. Most of the largest hacks targeted vendors who bill, mail or provide other services for hospitals, doctors and other medical providers.

Last year, a record 133 million health records were exposed in data breaches mainly carried out by hackers who've attacked health providers and their vendors, infiltrated computer systems and demanded ransom or other payments. An average of two health data hacks or thefts of at least 500 records were carried out daily last year in the United States, according to an analysis by The HIPAA Journal.

Reddit Signs $60 Million Deal to Scrape Your Online Community for AI Parts: Report

Gizmodo reported:

Reddit reportedly signed a $60 million deal with a "large AI company" to allow its online communities to be scraped for AI training data, according to Bloomberg on Friday. The unnamed AI company will sift through millions of posts on Reddit, and train a large language model on Reddit's threads.

Reddit is reportedly weighing an IPO with a $5 billion valuation, despite only bringing in $800 million in revenue last year. Reddit is not profitable but has a rich valuation because its online communities offer a perfect training ground for AI models.

However, licensing out your user's thoughts and ideas is not always reciprocated well. The most popular subreddits went dark in protest last year after users took issue with the company charging for access to its application programming interface (API), first announced in April of 2023.

Reddit's reported deal with an "unnamed large AI company" is exactly what the platform has been looking for. Big Tech is hungry for data, and that has turned legacy news organizations, community forums, and even the University of Michigan into more content farms. These deals, though upsetting to users, offer Reddit a path to profitability.

U.S. House Forms AI Task Force as Legislative Push Stalls

Reuters reported:

Leaders of the U.S. House of Representatives said Tuesday they are forming a bipartisan task force to explore potential legislation to address concerns around artificial intelligence.

Efforts in Congress to pass legislation addressing AI have stalled despite numerous high-level forums and legislative proposals over the past year.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Republican, and Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries said the task force would be charged with producing a comprehensive report and consider "guardrails that may be appropriate to safeguard the nation against current and emerging threats."

Security Camera Startup Wyze Apologizes for a Breach That Allowed 13,000 Customers to See Into Other People's Homes

Insider reported:

Security device company Wyze has apologized to customers after a camera breach let an estimated 13,000 users see into other people's homes.

The Seattle-based company, which specializes in smart-home products and wireless cameras, blamed the incident on "issue from a third-party caching client library" that was recently integrated into its system.

The company has suffered breaches before. In 2019, a Wyze data breach was discovered by cybersecurity firm Twelve Security and reported on by The New York Times.

The personal information of 2.4 million Wyze customers was exposed on the internet for 23 days. The data included people's usernames, emails, Wifi details, and health information, the reports said.

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